

Church and Community Members Embrace Physical Activity and Adopt Healthy Lifestyles

Issue

Pauline Scott, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) Region 2 Power to End Stroke (PTES) Ambassador, never imagined the domino effect that one presentation could have on a community until Fall 2007, when she presented the PTES campaign to her church congregation. Pastor Patrick Suber of Fosters Chapel Baptist Church told his congregation that day “they all needed to get up and move,” and he led the group by joining an exercise class.

Although increased physical activity is a protective factor and can reduce risks of many chronic diseases, many South Carolinians are not physically active. In the 2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS), 24.7 percent of respondents in SC DHEC Region 2 reported that they had no leisure time physical activity or exercise during the past 30 days other than their regular job.

Intervention

Fosters Chapel received a grant to build a walking trail, but it was not regularly used. Realizing how Pastor Suber’s statement mobilized the congregation, Mrs. Scott and other church members coordinated a “Saturday Walk Club” that included healthy fruit snacks and health screenings at 7 a.m. every Saturday. As the walk club progressed, participants became even more motivated and started walking at 5 a.m. on Tuesdays. Mrs. Scott was trained on PTES by SC DHEC and receives technical assistance from SC DHEC Region 2 staff. The PTES program, funded through the SC DHEC Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Division, uses education and awareness strategies to teach its core message of the three (3) R’s:

- Reduce stroke risk,
- Recognize stroke warning signs, and
- Respond immediately.

PTES unites African-Americans to help make an impact on the high incidence of stroke within their communities, and increasing their physical activity is one way to reduce their risk.

Impact

The walking trail is open to the general public, and in serving as president of a local Missionary Group, Mrs. Scott:

- Has invited 14 other churches to use the trail for their programs,
- Actively collaborates with four other churches to deliver the PTES program and other health-promoting activities at bi-annual health fairs, and
- Plans to partner with the Roebuck Improvement Association on their Annual Family Festival to reach many more Roebuck residents; potentially reaching thousands of people in the community.

Dr. Celedor Bon Hutto, a local family practitioner, noticed the progress of the church and invited Fosters Chapel and another church to participate in an Obesity Study. Seventy-five female study participants received physical assessments and will receive education to reduce obesity by increased physical activity.

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